



The Blob, film poster, 1958

## Tyranny of Structurelessness

*“Always in the bourgeois mind is this legend of the golden age, of a perfectly good man corrupted by institutions. Unfortunately not only is man not good without institutions, he is not evil either. He is no man at all; he is neither good nor evil; he is an unconscious brute.”*

Christopher Caudwell, “Liberty”, from “Studies in a Dying Culture”, 1938

Jo Freeman is from the Women's Movement in the USA. At a certain point in its development a crisis developed in this movement, and a confrontation between those who were trying to organise, versus those who were proposing that the movement should be "structureless".

Jo Freeman took the side of organisation. Her experience, words and argument can help us in our Induction course to understand the fundamental reasons why organisation is necessary. Her full article, Tyranny of Structurelessness, is attached, and linked below.

The case that Jo Freeman makes should be born in mind as we proceed later on in this Induction course to look at organising skills, processes, rules, ways and means. Such things are not trivial. They are the material substance of our work. Without them there is no politics.

Organisation does not of itself trap people; it liberates them. Organisation is also unavoidable. Says Freeman:

*"Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible; it may vary over time; it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed..."*

Freeman is not unaware that hers is a criticism of bourgeois ideology. She goes on:

*‘This means that to strive for a structureless group is as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an "objective" news story, "value-free" social science, or a "free" economy. A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones. Similarly "laissez faire" philosophy did not prevent the economically powerful from establishing control over wages, prices, and distribution of goods; it only prevented the government from doing so. Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful...’*

The communists, like Christopher Caudwell, quoted above, advocate for organisation, and more specifically for democratic organisation. The National Democratic Revolution is a process of the democratic organisation of society in all necessary ways, and especially as mass democratic organisation. The NDR is not solely concerned with representative state democracy. Representative democracy without massdemocratic organisation will revert to something like structurelessness, where the power structures are either hidden, or are out of reach of ordinary people.

Freeman continues:

*“For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be*

*explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that formalization of a structure of a group will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and make available some means of attacking it if the people involved are not at least responsible to the needs of the group at large. "Structurelessness" is organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one."*

In this Induction course, starting from Part 3, we will look at how structure can be made "explicit and not implicit", by formal means, and at how this works in practice.

Meanwhile in the remainder of this Part 2, we will reflect on the role of political education within the organisation, as a generator and a regenerator of organisation. We will look at the specifics of Trade Union organisation, and at the nature of Unions as mass (not vanguard) organisations.

We will finish the part with a consideration of the relationship between Mass and Vanguard, including the limitations of what the Party can do, but which must be done by the mass movement.

- The above is to introduce an original reading-text: [Tyranny of Structurelessness, Jo Freeman, 1973.](#)
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